

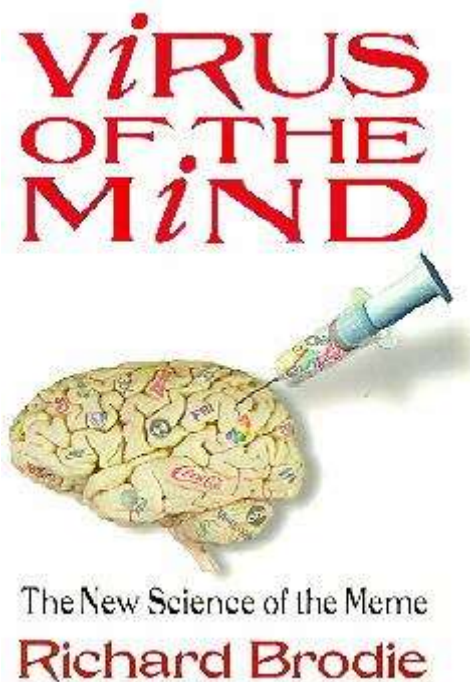
A summary of the book

# Virus of the mind

The new science of the Meme

By Richard Brodie

Summary by Kim Hartman



This is a summary of what I think is the most important and insightful parts of the book. I can't speak for anyone else and I strongly recommend you to read the book in order to fully grasp the concepts written here. My notes should only be seen as an addition that can be used to refresh your memory after you've read the book. Use the words in this summary as anchors to remember the vitals parts of the book.

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## Description from amazon

*Virus of the Mind* is the first popular book devoted to the science of *memetics*, a controversial new field that transcends psychology, biology, anthropology, and cognitive science. Memetics is the science of *memes*, the invisible but very real DNA of human society. In *Virus of the Mind*, **Richard Brodie** carefully builds on the work of scientists Richard Dawkins, Douglas Hofstadter, Daniel Dennett, and others who have become fascinated with memes and their potential impact on our lives. But Richard goes beyond science and dives into the meat of the issue: is the emergence of this new science going to have an impact on our lives like the emergence of atomic physics did in the Cold War? He would say the impact will be at least as great. While atomic bombs affect everybody's life, viruses of the mind touch lives in a more personal and more pernicious way. Mind viruses have already infected governments, educational systems, and inner cities, leading to some of the most pervasive and troublesome problems of society today: youth gangs, the welfare cycle, the deterioration of the public schools, and ever-growing government bureaucracy. Viruses of the mind are not a future worry: they are here with us now and are evolving to become better and better at their job of infecting us. The recent explosion of mass media and the information superhighway has made the earth a prime breeding ground for viruses of the mind. Will there be a mental plague? Will only some of us survive with our free will intact? Richard Brodie weaves together science, ethics, and current events as he raises these and other very disturbing questions about memes.

## **Chapter 1: Memes**

Memetics is the study of the workings of memes: how they interact, replicate, and evolve. A meme is anything that gets imitated. It's the basic unit of imitation. In the new paradigm, we look at cultural evolution from the point of view of the meme, rather than the point of view of an individual or society

### **Biological Definition of Meme(from Dawkins)**

*The meme is the basic unit of cultural transmission, or Imitation.*

According to this definition, everything we call "culture" is composed of atom like memes, which compete with one another.

### **Psychological Definition of Meme(from Plotkin)**

*A meme is the unit of cultural heredity analogous to the gene. It is the internal representation of knowledge.*

Likening your mind to a computer, memes are the software part of your programming; the brain and central nervous system, produced by your genes, are the hardware part. The memes in this definition don't live in the external trappings of culture, but in the mind. Under this definition, memes are to a human's behavior what our genes are to our bodies: internal representations of knowledge that result in outward effects on the world. Memes are hidden, internal representations of knowledge that result, again along with environmental influence, in external behavior and the production of cultural artifacts such as skirts and bridges.

### **Cognitive Definition of Meme(from Dennett)**

*A meme is an idea, the kind of complex idea that forms itself into a distinct memorable unit. It is spread by vehicles that are physical manifestations of the meme.*

Someone whose mind carried the spoked wheel meme might build a wagon with spoked wheels. Someone else would see the wagon, "catch" the spoked wheel meme, and build another wagon. The process would then repeat itself indefinitely.

### **The books definition of Meme**

*A meme is a unit of information in a mind whose existence influences events such that more copies of itself get created in other minds.*

Something goes on in the world that infects people with certain memes, and those memes eventually influence their hosts' behavior in such a way that the something gets repeated and/or spread. That something is a virus of the mind.

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The most interesting thing about memes is not whether they're true or false; it's that they are the building blocks of your mind.

## Chapter 2: Mind and behavior

If a meme is in your mind, it can greatly or subtly influence your behavior.

Instincts: support your survival and reproduction. They are things like your sex drive and your desire to breathe, eat, sleep, and so forth. The memes that appeal to people's instincts are more likely to replicate and spread throughout the population than the ones that don't. Everything you do that is not instinctual is the result of programming. You are programmed by memes.

Most memes that people are programmed with are acquired without any conscious intent; they just infect you and there you are, living your life by their programming. Such programming includes:

- Your religious (or atheistic) upbringing
- The example your parents set of how relationships work, or don't
- The TV shows and commercials you've watched

**Distinction meme:** Distinctions are one kind of meme. They are ways of carving up the world by categorizing or labeling things. All the distinctions you draw are human invented and not reality. Distinctions, as I just mentioned, are one kind of meme that contributes to your programming.

The earth is simply a distinction—a meme—we invented because it was convenient to put edges around the place we live in order to distinguish it from the rest of the universe. To the universe, it's all just stuff. You may say, "But there really are edges! There's where the dirt ends and the atmosphere begins, or where the atmosphere gives way to outer space!" Really? Dirt, atmosphere, outer space—they're all memes.

**Strategy meme:** Another kind of meme is a strategy, a kind of floating rule of thumb that tells you what to do when you come across an applicable situation in order to achieve some desired result. Strategy-memes are approximations, based on the idea that if you behave in a certain way, you'll have a certain effect on the world.

Strategies are beliefs about cause and effect. When you are programmed with a strategy-meme, you unconsciously believe behaving a certain way is likely to produce a certain effect. That behavior may trigger a chain of events that results in spreading the strategy-meme to another mind.

**Association meme:** A third kind of meme is an association, which links two or more memes in your mind. These attitudes are memes that associate other memes with one another so that when we are present to one, we become present to the other.

- Baseball, hot dogs, apple pie, and Chevrolet
- Sexy women and beer

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Associations are connections between memes. When you are programmed with an association-meme, the presence of one thing triggers a thought or feeling about something else. This causes a change in your behavior, which can ultimately spread the meme to another mind.

One of the ways the memes you are programmed with greatly affect your future is through self-fulfilling prophecy.

The distinction-memes we're programmed with form a perceptual filter on the immediate present world around us. People cannot take in any more than a small fraction of all the information that hits their sensory organs every second. What information do we take in, and what do we filter out? Our unconscious minds decide for us, based on the distinction-memes we are programmed with.

Ever learn a new word and suddenly see it everywhere? That word was there all the time: you just didn't notice it because you didn't have a distinction-meme for it. If you start using it, or tell a friend how odd it is that you've been seeing this word all over the place, you've just spread the meme to another mind

### Chapter 3: viruses

**Virus:** viruses invade the reproductive facilities of other organisms and put them to use making copies of itself. We call this creature a virus. Viruses can exist in biology, computers and culture. A virus is anything that takes external copying equipment and puts it to work making copies of itself.

**The universe of the mind, of culture, of thought:** This is the universe in which the paradigm shift is taking place. From an old model of cultural evolution based on innovation and conquest, we are shifting to a new model based on memetics and viruses of the mind. Mind viruses are both discovered and invented: they can evolve naturally or be created consciously. The mind has all the properties a virus needs to exist, just as do cells and computers

**Exponential growth:** Growth by doubling is called exponential growth, and it works very quickly to fill up whatever space is available.

**Mutation:** Anywhere there is copying machinery, there can be viruses. A mutation is an error in copying. It produces a defective—or possibly improved in some sense—copy instead of an exact duplicate of the original.

#### About viruses:

- A virus doesn't change the way in which DNA gets copied; a virus inserts new information to be copied along with.
- One of the instructions that the virus gives is to manufacture more viruses and in some way spread them to other hosts. This particular instruction is essential or the virus would quickly die out.
- A successful virus must let its host live long enough to spread the virus.
- A virus's mission is to make as many copies of itself as possible.

**The penetration of mind:** Our minds excel both at copying information and at following instructions. Remember the four characteristics of a virus: penetration, copying, possibly issuing instructions, and spreading. They can penetrate our minds because we are so adept at learning new ideas and information. They are copied by us communicating with each other, something we are getting better and better at. Mind viruses issue instructions by programming us with new memes that affect our behavior. They spread when the chain of events stemming from that new behavior reaches an uninfected mind. They can be any bit of culture whose existence touches people, causing them to shift their thinking and thus their behavior, eventually causing reinforcement or proliferation of that same bit of culture.

A designer virus is carefully crafted to infect people with a set of memes that influence them to spread the virus throughout the population.



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You unwittingly have a portion of yourself diverted from what you might otherwise be doing with your life, and instead devoted to doing the work of the mind virus.

Memetics provides new insight into the way our minds, societies, and cultures work.

## Chapter 4: Evolution

**Replicators:** As things change, the things that are good at sticking around and replicating themselves do so, while the other things don't. Anything at all that gets copied—no matter what the copying mechanism, and whether or not there is a conscious intention to copy—is a replicator. Sometimes mistakes get made in copying. That's necessary for evolution to take place.

**Natural selection:** means that the forces of nature are doing the selecting, as opposed to the artificial selection of breeding pedigreed dogs, for example, in which people do the selecting. The things that are not good at sticking around eventually disappear through entropy, the tendency of things to randomize and level out over time, like sand castles on a beach. Fitness, in evolution, means the likelihood of being copied. The fitter something is, the greater its chances of being copied.

**The fittest DNA:** Prior to Hamilton's work, most scientists had assumed evolution revolved around "us," or individuals of whatever species we are discussing. The selfish-gene theory shifted the evolutionary spotlight from the fittest individuals onto the fittest DNA. After all, it is the DNA that carries the information passed from one generation to the next. The individuals of a species don't, strictly speaking, replicate copies of themselves. Parents don't clone themselves to produce children who are exact copies. Instead, they cause copies of pieces of DNA to be reproduced in a new individual.

**Genes:** Those pieces of DNA that play this game, causing themselves to be replicated by whatever means, are called genes. The fact that evolution seems to revolve around their well-being rather than ours makes them selfish genes. From a gene's point of view, a human being is just a way of making more genes - nothing more than a piece of DNA that is good at replicating in his environment

**Evolution:** Evolution, of genes or memes, reflects the haphazard and baroque result of an ongoing struggle, not the product of a brilliantly engineered design. What's the difference between evolution and engineering? Engineering is the designing of a whole out of parts suited to their individual purposes. Evolution is the process of tiny incremental changes, each making some small or large improvement in the ability of the thing to survive and reproduce. A good engineer avoids the kluge—jargon for the use of a part not particularly suited to its purpose. But evolution favors, even cherishes, the kluge. Suddenly finding a new purpose for a part without significantly diminishing its old function is a staple of the evolutionary process

**DNA:** The DNA is not a blueprint, contrary to a popular metaphor. There is no place in the human DNA that represents the right index finger, the left little toenail. From the DNA's point of view, having copies of itself is our whole point for existing. Our minds, lives, and cultures are affected by the evolution of something besides DNA.

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**The mind:** Today we have another medium for storing information—one that replicates, mutates, and propagates far, far faster than DNA. We have a medium so effective at evolution that new replicators can be created, tried, and spread wildly all in days or even hours, as compared to thousands of years for DNA. It's called the mind, and the replicator that evolves in our minds is called the meme.

## Chapter 5: The evolution of memes

**Meme:** A meme is a replicator that uses the medium of our minds to replicate. Meme evolution happens because our minds are good at copying and innovating—ideas, behaviors, tunes, shapes, structures, and so on.

**The view of the meme:** Instead of looking at meme evolution from our own point of view as we normally do, we need to look at it from the point of view of the meme, as if the meme were acting in its own selfish interests and doing whatever it takes to replicate and become widespread. The evolution of ideas, culture, and society revolves around the selfish meme just as the evolution of species revolves around the selfish gene. So from a meme's point of view, not only our minds and brains but also our whole bodies, cities, countries, and certainly television sets exist for that same selfish purpose.

The most popular and prevalent parts of our culture are the most effective at copying memes. The most popular ideas are the ones that spread the easiest. The most popular art is the art with the fittest memes.

**Originally, the purpose of our brains was one or more of the following:**

- To increase our chances of surviving to the age of reproduction and beyond
- To increase the number of children we had
- To increase our chances of mating with a good mating partner, someone who would likely produce the most copies of the DNA responsible for the brain

**The software of memes:** our brains made us better at pursuing the four basic drives animals have, fondly referred to by zoologists as the “four F's”: fighting, fleeing, feeding, and—fucking—finding a mate. Memes build on these basic brain functions; these brain functions are part of the “hardware design” for the software called memes.

**Copying ideas:** As animals evolved, those that had a superior ability to communicate certain information tended to survive and reproduce better than the others. If our minds didn't have the ability to copy ideas from each other, all of us would be limited to the knowledge we could gather for ourselves in a single lifetime. Language made meme evolution explode. It revolutionized communication by making it possible to create new concepts, new distinctions; to associate one thing with another; and to share strategies.

From a gene's point of view, important information is whatever will protect, and increase the number of copies of, that gene.

Memes involving danger, food, and sex spread faster than other memes because we are wired to pay more attention to them—we have buttons around those subjects.

**Anger, fear, hunger, and lust:** These four feelings are wired so directly into our brains that, civilized though we may get, we experience from time to time something or someone

“pushing our buttons”—saying or doing something that generates one of these basic feelings in us. It’s very, very difficult to avoid paying attention when it happens. And where there’s attention, there are memes. The idea of paying attention plays a central role in understanding memes. A meme that lots of people pay attention to will be more successful than a meme that few notice.

Our brains evolved countless secondary strategies to make us better not only at survival and reproduction, but also at satisfying those four first-order urges.

- **Belonging.** Humans are gregarious—that is, they like company. Memes that give people a feeling of belonging to a group have an advantage over memes that don’t.
- **Distinguishing yourself.** A drive to do something new, innovative, or significant makes an individual more likely to find food or shelter and makes him stand out from the crowd as a potential mate.
- **Caring.** Since humans share the great majority of their DNA with all other humans, it makes sense that we evolved a drive to care about the welfare of other people
- **Approval.** A drive to do what others, or you yourself, approve of. As animals and humans evolved into societies, individuals fulfilling whatever their roles were did a better job of perpetuating their genes, and presumably the genes shared by others in their community, than those who didn’t play by the rules
- **Obeying authority.** Going along with that authority would increase his DNA’s chance of survival and replication. you get some kind of good feeling when you’re doing the thing that the drive drives you to do, or you get a bad feeling when you’re not

People have many secondary drives connected to various strong feelings, and memes that activate these feelings have the evolutionary advantage. Our tendency to pay special attention to these memes makes them more likely to replicate and become embedded in our culture.

Quality of life is not what natural selection is about; quantity of replication is.

**Pushing our buttons:** Pushing our buttons is a great way to attract attention to a meme. In addition to the survival-oriented memes that are still with us, there are some more types of memes that don’t seem to particularly help or hurt our survival, but by their very nature are fit to spread effectively—these are memes that are fit simply because they are variations on the idea *Spread this meme*:

- **Tradition.** A strategy-meme to continue what was done or believed. People infected with tradition memes are programmed to “repeat this meme in the future and spread this meme into future generations!” Traditions die hard.

- **Evangelism.** It makes little difference whether the thing being evangelized is true or false, good or bad; evangelism works so well that it has become one of the most prevalent memes on Earth. Evangelism tells us to “spread this meme as much as you can!”

Then there are memes that become entrenched in people’s minds and are extremely resistant to attack:

- **Faith.** Any meme that entails believing in it blindly can never be dislodged from your belief system by any attack or argument.
- **Skepticism.** Questioning new ideas is a defense against new memes. A faithful and a skeptic can argue forever and never learn anything.

Other memes are fit because of the nature of communication:

- **Familiarity.** The familiar spreads more quickly than the unfamiliar because people have distinction-memes for familiar things already and therefore notice them more.
- **Making sense.** Memes that make sense spread more quickly than ones that don’t. People are quick to accept flawed explanations that make more sense over more accurate ones that are harder to understand.

Ideas are infectious. We catch them from other people’s behavior, from the little bits of culture all around us. Ideas spread according to how good their memes are, not so much according to how useful they are to our lives or even according to how true they are.

What we’re really evolving toward is a world full of memes and mind viruses that replicate better.

## **Chapter 6: Sex: the root of all evolution**

You are the result of an unbroken chain spanning thousands of generations of males and females who were all successful at finding a mate.

As a result of genetic evolution, individuals evolve to be more and more sexually attractive.

One way in which evolution happened to make progress was by specializing the roles of males and females, a distinction known as sexual differentiation

The DNA of males who mated with only one female had a terrible disadvantage: the other males who are going around spreading their DNA as widely as possible were going to have a lot more children. Without considering any other factors, males evolved to reproduce as much as possible. Remember: it's all about DNA

In the harsh reality of genetic evolution, there was no concern for love, sensitivity, or fairness; the only thing that mattered was how many children you had—children who themselves grew up to reproduce.

Because women's genes had more to gain by being picky about mates, evolution made women the ones who usually choose from among suitors. Men had to compete to be chosen.

Sex roles have been affected greatly by meme evolution, so we find men and women being less successful at reproducing, more frustrated in their relationships, and all around more confused as the primitive societies we evolved to live in have been supplanted by incredibly complicated and powerful cultural forces.

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## **Chapter 7: Survival and fear**

Obvious stuff. Therefore, no notes. I suggest you read a basic book about evolutionary psychology if you want to know more about this.



## Chapter 8: How we get programmed

You know what a meme is—a thought, belief, or attitude in your mind that can spread to and from other people’s minds. You know that we human beings are the medium for the evolution of memes. You understand how evolution works by natural selection—survival of the fittest. And you’ve seen how our own genetic evolution gives us buttons: tendencies to pay special attention to certain things—especially danger, food, and sex—which helped us survive and reproduce in prehistoric times.

Memes enter our minds without our permission. They become part of our mental programming and influence our lives without our even being aware of it.

### We get infected by new memes in three ways:

**Conditioning.** The first way we get infected is through conditioning, or repetition. If we hear something repeated often enough, it becomes part of our programming.

**Cognitive dissonance** . The second way is through a mechanism known as cognitive dissonance. When things don’t make sense, our minds struggles to make them make sense

**Trojan horse.** The third way new memes enter our minds is by taking advantage of our genetic buttons in the manner of the Trojan horse. We are susceptible to bundles of memes that push our buttons to get our attention and then sneak in some other memes along with them.

viruses of the mind take advantage of one or all of these methods to make their initial inroads into our minds.

*Conditioning*—programming by repetition—is the easiest way to acquire memes that don’t push any of your buttons effectively. You can be conditioned, through repetition, to acquire new distinction-memes that make reality look different to you and provide reinforcing evidence that keeps those distinction memes in place. Whenever you’re in a repeated situation in which a reward is available for certain behavior, you are being conditioned.

Those new memes conflict with your old ones, and a mental tension is created. Your mind wants to resolve the conflict. It does so by creating a new meme.

Fraternity hazings, boot camp, and some religious or spiritual disciplines put people through difficult tests and may demand demonstrations of loyalty before releasing the pressure. That creates an *association-meme* between the demonstration of loyalty and the good feeling caused by the release of pressure

With *cognitive dissonance*, people end up believing they have received something valuable, something deserving of their loyalty, when in reality all that has happened is that the

people who were torturing them have stopped. Cognitive dissonance can be used to create a meme of submission and loyalty to whatever authority is causing the dissonance.

It works better—creates stronger memes—to give the reward only occasionally than it does to give it all the time. So a truly manipulative meme programmer will withhold the reward most of the time even if the subject performs flawlessly, knowing this will create stronger programming.

*The Trojan horse* method of programming works by getting you to pay attention to one meme, then sneaking in a whole bundle of others along with it. A Trojan horse can take advantage of your instinctive buttons, pushing them to get your attention and then sneaking in another agenda

**Sales:** The whole point of sales is to influence people's beliefs—infect them with certain memes—for direct economic gain

Asking questions is a Trojan-horse method for infecting people with memes. The very act of asking people a question can cause them to create or reinforce a meme in their minds. Asking enough of the right questions can actually change someone's belief system, and therefore influence the person's behavior.

The key to effective sales is finding what the customer considers valuable about your product and reinforcing that meme in his mind. The salesperson's job is to create a meme in the customer's mind that says I believe I'm going to buy this. The best salespeople don't look upon the sale as an adversarial relationship but as a genuine win-win situation. The customer gets something she wants, and the salesperson gets the commission. So the salesperson will be trying to get you to figure out why you want the product and trying to have you create memes reinforcing your belief in the product's value

A salesperson's favorite meme, of course, is, "Yes, I'll take it." Asking a question those results in the creation of that meme is called closing. There are all kinds of different and sneaky ways to close. They fall into three camps: direct, embedded, and presumptive. All have the same goal: to create the yes-meme in the customer. The direct close includes any straightforward request for the Sale.

**Infected by a mind virus:** Here's what it looks like when you're infected by a mind virus. When a virus of the mind infects you, it may resemble one of these scenarios:

**Repetition.** Repeating a meme until it becomes familiar and part of your programming is one method of mind-virus penetration.

**Cognitive dissonance.** Being placed in a paradoxical or mentally uncomfortable situation can lead to being reprogrammed with new memes that relieve the mental stress

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**Trojan horse.** Bundling less-attractive memes with more appealing ones.

A mind virus needs a way to reproduce itself faithfully—without distortion or omission. That can be accomplished in a number of different ways:

- By instilling a belief that tradition is important
- By saying a certain set of memes is the Truth
- By setting up a structure to reward verbatim copying and/or punish modification

**Spelling:** It's not true that there's one and only one correct way to spell a word—it's just a meme. We think it's true because all our lives people have been criticizing us for misspelling words—we've been programmed.

**Programming:** all of what we think of as the Truth is composed of memes, and most of those memes just came into our heads through programming, without any of our own conscious choice involved

**Evangelism:** You can have the world's greatest idea, but unless you shout about it, crusade—evangelize—it has no impact. Evangelism is the intentional spreading of memes.

## Chapter 9: Cultural viruses

When replication occurs with slight changes in the replicator, and those modified replicators are selected somehow for their fitness, then we have evolution.

All cultural institutions, regardless of their initial design or intention (if any), evolve to have but one goal: to perpetuate themselves. If you're designing a cultural institution these days, you've got to know memetics. If you don't design the thing with good memes that will make it self-perpetuating from day one, it will either die out quickly or evolve to become self-perpetuating.

There are two ways to make something a better replicator: make it better exploit the environment, or change the environment to its advantage.

**TV:** the institution of television, while originally created as entertainment, has evolved into a self-perpetuating cultural virus with little possibility of anything but broadcasting the most gripping, button-pushing sounds and images.

**Truth:** Truth is not one of the strong selectors for memes.

**Making sense:** Making sense is a selector, since people have a drive to make sense of things, but as we know, that does not always correspond to truth.

**Pets:** Our beloved dogs, cats, iguanas, and so on, along with the enormous industries that have arisen to support them, are all part of a huge cultural virus known as pets. From their point of view, though, we're essentially their slaves. Let's take a look. A virus of the mind is something out in the world that, by its existence, alters people's behavior so that more copies of the thing get created. Pets have all the qualities necessary to be a virus of the mind:

- Pets penetrate our minds by attracting our attention.
- Pets actually program us to take care of them in several ways
- Pets are faithfully reproduced, with the help, of course, of
- Their own DNA and of the resources we devote to caring for them.
- And of course pets spreading the natural way.

The ones that weren't cute—that weren't able to command our resources, to enslave us into taking care of them—they died! Its natural selection in action: the cute ones bred with each other until we reached the point we're at today . . . infected with the pet virus.

**Corruption:** The very instant we set up a bureaucracy, a government, or a big business with extraordinary power over our lives, corruption begins. Little by little, the good intentions originally present in the organization become stifled, choked, or even replaced by an evolving set of memes that have no claim to power other than that they are good at spreading.

## **Chapter 10: The memetics of religion**

Problem solving was a good survival skill. But once that mechanism came into existence, early humans naturally turned it to some of the big problems, the ones philosophers throughout the ages have been struggling with:

- Where did we come from?
- Why are we here?
- What should we do?

The cognitive dissonance set up by having these questions in mind caused the creation of some memes that made sense as answers. And from these guesses evolved mythology, philosophy, and religion.

## Chapter 11: Designer viruses – how to start a cult

The new science of memetics provides extraordinarily powerful tools for manipulation: designer viruses that, once unleashed, self-replicate and channel people's lives toward some self-serving end. Unlike cultural viruses, which simply evolve to perpetuate themselves, these Machiavellian designer viruses serve their creators' agendas.

*The memes we're programmed with drive our behavior.*

**Profit-motivated designer viruses :** Profit-motivated designer viruses, many of which are completely legal and aboveboard today, have their shady origins in the crooked Ponzi scheme. Ponzi's scheme was simple: as long as his base of investors kept growing, he could pay off early investors with the cash pumped in by later ones. The key to a successful profit virus is having an incentive to evangelize or enroll new people

**Ponzi scheme as strategy-meme:** Invest with Ponzi. Bundled with powerful button-pushing window of opportunity and reward memes—a Get rich quick meme—Ponzi's scheme attracted so much attention that it spread quickly throughout the general public

**Pyramid schemes:** Pyramid schemes rely on the same button-pushing memes that the Ponzi scheme does and add in the powerful force of evangelism. Since infected people have a stake in enrolling new players in the pyramid virus, the illusion of reward doesn't need to be as great as with the Ponzi scheme. Rather than simply attracting new investors, there is now an army of recruiters intentionally infecting people with the pyramid virus.

**Multilevel marketing:** Multilevel marketing is distinct from a pyramid scheme and is legal. Instead of selling memberships that have no value except that they give you the right to sell more memberships, MLM creates a pyramid shaped network of distributors of an actual product. Up line distributors receive a percentage of the sales from the down line distributors whom they recruited.

**Creating a cult:** There are two key elements necessary for a cult:

- Each individual commits to some mission or higher purpose not chosen through personal, conscious reflection.
- There are serious consequences attached to leaving.

These two memes—commitment to mission and consequences of leaving—are sufficient to harness people's lives and labors in a cult. When combined with some form of evangelism, a powerful mind virus is created, a power virus that spreads automatically as far as it can throughout the population.

When cult members devote their life energies to a purpose outside themselves that gives power to whatever the external purpose is.

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The companies that try out strategies that effectively harness memes simply do better and get copied by others.

**Belief system:** When you get people to commit to a *belief system* and put up barriers to keep them from changing their minds, you've effectively harnessed their lives and energies. Add *evangelism* and you've created a self-spreading power virus, using up people's lives to achieve some end. Just find some attractive memes to suck people in and program them to do your bidding, including evangelizing the cult to others. But watch out! It's the virus of the mind that really has the power, not you.

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## **Chapter 12: disinfection**

Not interesting for me. Therefore, no notes from this chapter.



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